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1884

IN AND OUT THE PIGSKIN.



JOHN A. SEAVERNS

IN AND OUT
OF THE
PIG-SKIN.

BY
GEORGE F. UNDERHILL,
AUTHOR OF "IN AT THE DEATH," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALLIS MACKAY.

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, LD.

1893.

PREFACE.

IN submitting the following story to my readers, I know that it is my duty to write a preface, though I also know that few readers ever read a preface. Yet in the present instance there are two remarks which I should wish my reading public to notice.

In the first place, I must express in print the great pleasure it has afforded me to have worked with my old friend Mr. Wallis Mackay. In the second place, I must thank the editor of "Piccadilly" for his courtesy in allowing me to publish in volume form the following tale which originally appeared in his newspaper.

GEORGE F. UNDERHILL.

PENN HALL, NEAR WOLVERHAMPTON,
9th August, 1892.

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CHAPTER I.

I DETERMINE TO BE A SPORTSMAN.



I AM not a jealous man ; far from it. The world has treated me too well for me to be angry with it. And yet, if the truth must be told—and my reminiscences would be of small value if they were not true—it was through jealousy, that I, at the sober age of forty-two, first devoted

myself to the pursuit of sport. It happened very shortly after I had taken Lavinia Lodge, which, as everybody knows, is within a mile of the sporting and agricultural town of Brightemall, from which the Brightemall Hunt derives its name. Lavinia Lodge—my wife was christened Lavinia—was, and still is, on the high-road leading out of Brightemall, to the rest of the civilized world, which means to most of the meets of the Brightemall Hunt. The consequence of this situation, for which I pay more rent than I ought to, was that I was constantly disturbed during the winter months at the end of my breakfast by Lavvy—that is, my wife—rushing to the window, and exclaiming—

“Herbie! Come here, dear! Look! Here are some more gentlemen in vermillion jackets!”

Lavvy was always fond of using long adjectives. Her mother suffered from two mental afflictions—one, the duty of a son-in-law; the other, higher education for women.

I know that Lavvy has inherited the latter, and that young idiot, Foolby, who is always hanging about smoking my cigars and drinking my whisky, will soon know that she has inherited the former.

These periodical excursions from the breakfast-table to the window caused me considerable uneasiness. I grew jealous of the gentlemen in the vermilion jackets, and I asked myself, "Why should I not wear a red coat, and ride a horse over other people's land? Foolby does it, and Foolby is an ass. I am not an ass, but I ought to be able to do anything that an ass can do."

I suggested the idea to my wife, thinking that she would be pleased. To my surprise, she burst out laughing.

"Why, Herbie, you would look ridiculous!"

I was indignant, and determined to exercise my marital authority.

"Lavinia," I said, "I have yet to learn under what circumstances I can look ridiculous."

“Very well, Herbert. Only remember, it’s nothing to do with me. Don’t blame me when you tumble off.”

I had not thought of that. Still, this opposition on the part of my wife made me more anxious than ever to become a sportsman. Yes, I would purchase a horse and suitable garments and ride with the dogs and kill a fox.

Having made this resolution, the next thing to do was to carry it out. I determined to ask Foolby’s advice. It is the only subject on which I should ask Foolby’s advice ; but then, as he is always talking about hunting, I suppose he must know something about it. I went to see him and told him my intention. He seemed delighted.

“All right, sonny. I’ll run up to town and see you rigged out properly. There are two or three gees down here which would suit you down to the ground, and will stand quiet when you fall there, too, old man.”

I considered this impertinent on Foolby's part, especially as I had shrewd suspicions that he wished to become my son-in-law. Still, I thought it kind of him at the time. It occurred to me afterwards that he had a very good run round London at my expense, but I did not mention this to my wife or daughter. It might have led to disagreeable consequences, especially if Lavvy had asked me about all the places to which we went.

I need not say anything more about our trip to town except that in due course I became the proud possessor of a red coat, two pairs of breeches, and top-boots. I likewise bought a peak cap. I remember that cap. I had a difference of opinion with Foolby about it. He wanted me to buy what he called a "hunting topper"—so did the hatter.

"Very few gentlemen wear hunting caps now, sir. Only the Hunt servants wear them as a rule."

"I am a sportsman first and a gentleman afterwards," I answered with dignity. Foolby smiled approval of the sentiment. What an idiotic smile that fellow has! One could almost think he was laughing at one.

On my return to Lavinia Lodge I felt on the most excellent terms with myself. Did not I possess the garments which a sportsman ought to wear? Could not I be photographed in them? Could not I be painted in them? A portrait of myself in hunting costume would look most imposing in our dining-room at Lavinia Lodge.

But, although I was in the position to enter a studio in the garb of a sportsman, I could not enter the hunting-field in that character for the simple reason that I did not possess a horse. Certainly Foolby had promised to buy me one, but then Foolby's promises are like the proverbial pie-crust. I did not know what to do—that is to say, I did not know how to buy a horse. But I flatter myself I am a philosopher so far as the ways of this world are concerned ;

so, acting up to my philosophy, I asked Foolby to dinner.

He accepted my invitation. I began to hold a better opinion of Foolby's mental ability.

The dinner hour arrived, and with it Foolby and the dinner. After Lavvy's previous expressions with regard to my becoming a sportsman, I did not deem it wise to mention to Foolby during dinner his promise to buy me a horse. I reserved it until the ladies had retired. I may say that, although I have a strong affection for my daughter Bella, I do wish that she would eat her dessert more quickly when Foolby is here, and that Foolby would not press her to take a second glass of port when she is eating sweet biscuits.

I was told at school that it is a long lane which has no turning; in middle age I am perfectly certain that it is a long time after dinner before women turn to the drawing-room at Lavinia Lodge, except on those occasions when it is my duty to take in a young and



A LONG GOOD-NIGHT.

beautiful bride. Now on this evening, when I want to have a confidential chat with Foolby, my wife will start an argument about matrimonial agencies—things she knows nothing about. I wondered where Foolby got all his information from. Then I conferred a blessing—not verbally, but inwardly—upon our domestic servant, for informing Lavvy that the coffee was in the drawing-room. I have made up my mind to bestow a pecuniary benediction upon that girl.

She was the cause of the ladies retiring, though not before Lavvy reminded me, in a very audible whisper, that we were not to sit over our wine too long. I do wish that Lavvy would not whisper so audibly; it is so very embarrassing. But on this occasion I put the embarrassment in my throat, together with the contents of my wineglass, and pushed the decanter towards Foolby.

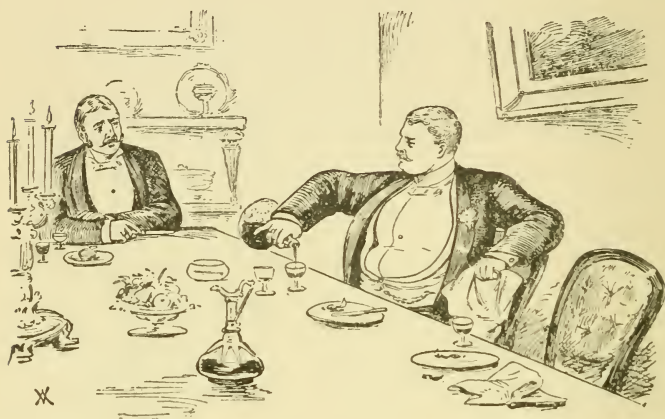
“The bottle is with you, Foolby,” I said.

Foolby promptly made preparations to

put the contents of the bottle within him. Having completed these to his satisfaction, he asked—

“Well! do the togs fit all right?”

I do wish Foolby would not use slang.



“WELL, DO THE TOGS FIT?”

Before a man of my age it is not respectful, to say the least of it. My answer to him was dignified.

“Yes, Foolby, my sporting garments meet with my entire satisfaction. But——”

“You don’t mean to say that you’ve heard

from that girl at the Empire. I told you not to give her your address."

"No, Foolby, no! The incident had escaped my memory. But I thought you must have forgotten your promise to buy me suitable mounts."

"Not at all. You come to my place on Tuesday next, and I will see that you have what you want."

I thanked Foolby: but I did not thank him for keeping me waiting in the cold for a quarter of an hour while he said "Good night" to Bella. It showed a lack of consideration on his part, which I felt nearly as much as the lack of warmth.

CHAPTER II.

I BUY MY HUNTERS.



BEAU BRUMMEL AND SIR ROGER.

FOOLBY'S method of procedure is correct, then I have come to the conclusion that purchasing horses is entirely different from any other purchase.

Foolby says it's the same thing as buying a wife, except that a wife is more difficult than a horse to get rid of, if she don't suit. Thinking this remark funny, I retailed it to Lavinia as an original

one of my own ; but she did not even smile. It is astonishing what little sense of humour women have. Bella, too, looked cross. I should have said that Foolby told me so ; but I did not think of saying it until the next Sunday morning in church.

I was punctual to the second in keeping the appointment which I had made with Foolby, though my punctuality was not equalled by my self-assurance. In fact, I was in a state of extreme nervousness. My chief desire was to conceal my ignorance of horseflesh ; my chief grief was that I was painfully conscious that I should be utterly unable to do so.

Foolby's house is about a mile out of Brightemall, on the opposite side to Lavinia Lodge. Foolby calls it his hunting-box, which is certainly an appropriate name, as the stables are quite as extensive, if not more so, than the house itself. Behind is a large grass field, in which he has erected every description of jump. Here he says he "schools" his horses, and I have a faint idea that he intends to "school"

me as well ; but if he thinks that I am going to ride in cold blood over a lot of fences for his amusement he is very much mistaken. I am too old to act the part of a circus clown.

On entering Foolby's dining-room I found him engaged in drinking beer with a nondescript kind of individual, to whom he introduced me.

"Mr. Ridemruff has brought down a couple of nags for you to look at."

"And I think you'll like 'em, sir, when you've seen 'em and cast a leg across 'em."

I did not quite know how to answer this remark, so merely nodded, and helped myself to a glass of beer to give me courage for anything that might follow. I then proceeded to make a closer examination of Mr. Ridemruff.

He might have been either a farmer, a horse-dealer, or a horse-breaker, and probably was a combination of all three, with a little bit of the steeplechase jockey thrown in. He certainly

looked the picture of a perfect horseman, and I regarded him with feelings of admiration and an inward conviction that he saw at a glance that I could not ride. There was a twinkle in his keen eye as he suggested that I should "cast a leg" across his horses, which showed that he anticipated much amusement from watching my performances. From his large horseshoe pin down to his



MR. RIDEMRUFF.

jack-boots, which had evidently seen much wear, his whole costume denoted his profession. His check coat, which reminded me of a draught-board, and his startling fancy waistcoat, were cut in a fashion peculiar to themselves, which made the coat look too short and the waistcoat too long. I had not time to observe more about him before he said to me—

“ Mr. Foolby tells me, sir, that you hav’n’t hunted or ridden much before.”

“ Just so ; therefore I want something very quiet.”

“ And I’ve got two animals ’ere, sir, which ’ull be the very thing for you, quiet as lambs, without any vice. They’ve been used to carry a nervous old gentleman.”

Mr. Ridemruff said this as if he thought that I was also a nervous old gentleman. I felt annoyed, and should have expressed my annoyance in suitable terms, had not Foolby suggested that we should go out and see the horses, which we found in the field in the charge of a small

boy, who was riding one and leading the other. He was so small that it was a wonder to me however he managed to get on to the back of the horse he was bestriding.

“What are their names?” I asked, by way of beginning the conversation.

“Beau Brummel and Sir Roger, sir. That chestnut was called Beau Brummel on account of his good looks. I believe there was once a very ’andsome gent of that name, sir.”

I looked at Beau Brummel to see if I could discover a likeness; if there was one, the late Mr. Brummel must have been very tall and very thin, with a superabundant number of angles about his body, for his namesake seemed to be composed of nothing but bone. His chief advantage was that you could not only look at him, but also under him as well if you chose, though this advantage was somewhat negatived by the fact that you could not look over him.

“He is rather tall,” I ventured to remark.

“Yes, sir; but, Lord bless you! that ain’t

no fault. It's a good thing to have a tall 'oss, 'cause, when he comes to a fence, he can look over first, and see what's on the other side. Why, that 'oss can step over many a place that many another 'oss couldn't even jump. Then mark his action, sir. Jim, trot the Beau."

Jim appeared to be the name of the diminutive urchin I have already mentioned. He proceeded to trot Mr. Brummel's namesake backwards and forwards. Then he cantered him. Foolby looked at the performance with a knowing air while he listened to Mr. Ridemruff's eulogies of his horse. Ridemruff seems to have forgotten that it is I, and not Foolby, whom he wants to become a purchaser.

I was debating in my own mind whether or not I should bring this fact into the more immediate notice of Ridemruff, when that gentleman remarked—

"Now, Mr. Foolby, throw your leg across 'im! Take 'im over anything you like, sir."

I felt that I owed a debt of gratitude to Ridemruff. Foolby could not refuse to make

an exhibition of himself. I certainly should have refused. I had every confidence in Beau Brummel,—but—well, I was not so confident of myself.

Foolby, thus appealed to, got on to Beau Brummel's back. I wished at the time that either I was as tall as Foolby, or that the Beau was shorter than he was, for I should have required a pair of steps to enable me to get comfortably into the saddle. Then I contented myself with watching narrowly the way in which the Beau conducted himself, knowing that all the while Ridemruff was equally narrowly watching me, as he made running comments on the merits of his quadruped. I answered him in monosyllables, for although I had made up my mind to become a purchaser, yet I knew that the more I betrayed my enthusiasm the greater would be Mr. Ridemruff's price.

“What do you want for him?” I ventured to ask, at length, after Foolby had jumped the Beau over three or four fences.

“Well, sir, as you’re a friend of Mr. Foolby’s, I’ll only say a ’undred guineas, though the ’oss *is* worth an ’undred and fifty.”

It was the first time since my acquaintance with Foolby that he had been the means of saving me money. I record the fact because it was likewise the last time.

“Now ’ave a look at Sir Roger, sir,” continued Ridemruff, who from my silence had evidently concluded that I would give him a hundred guineas for the Beau. “You’ll like ’im as well as the other, though he is a different make of hanimal.”

There could be no doubt that Ridemruff spoke the truth. If Beau Brummel was tall and thin, Sir Roger made up for his deficiencies by being short and fat. He had a habit, too, of jerking his head towards the ground, which reminded me forcibly of the polite bow with which the courteous old knight was accustomed to receive his guests. I subsequently discovered that this habit was decidedly prejudicial to the comfort of his rider.

Foolby got off the back of the Beau, and got on to the back of Sir Roger, a proceeding which the latter resented, by putting his nose to the earth and his hind-legs to the skies.

“Only his play, sir,” remarked Ridemruff.

I may say that this was, and still is, Sir Roger’s way of saying “farewell.” It resembles the “parting” bow of a publisher to an author, whose manuscript has been rejected, with the single difference that the publisher is generally unwilling to “part,” while Sir Roger is willing—to part company at all events.

However, he did not succeed in parting company with Foolby. I wished that he had, so that I could have chaffed Foolby about it on future occasions in the presence of Bella. As it was, Foolby hit him with his whip on the portion of his body nearest to his tail, and then jumped him over some hurdles, much to Ridemruff’s satisfaction.

“I like to see a good man on a good ’oss, sir.”

This was said loud enough for Foolby to hear. He had just ridden up to us. He dismounted, and we all three walked back to the house.

"Shall I buy?" I asked Foolby in a whisper.

"At a price," he replied in the same tone.

We then had some more beer. It is wonderful how, when a horse changes hands, so much drink should change places from the tumbler to the human mouth. Some time I will work up a joke about this, under the heading of "A Double Transfer."

Whether it was the influence of the beer or the influence of Ridemruff's plausible conversation to this day I do not know. I only know that I parted with a cheque for a hundred and seventy guineas, and Ridemruff parted with the Beau and Sir Roger.

"Where shall I send 'em to, sir?"

This was a question I was not prepared to answer. Lavinia Lodge certainly boasts of a

carriage-house, and a stable containing two stalls. But then I had no groom, and I was hardly equal to looking after my new purchases myself. Luckily Foolby came to the rescue.

“If I were you, I should let them stand at livery at the White Lion till you have made arrangements at home. If Ridemruff will take them there now we can walk down and see about it.”

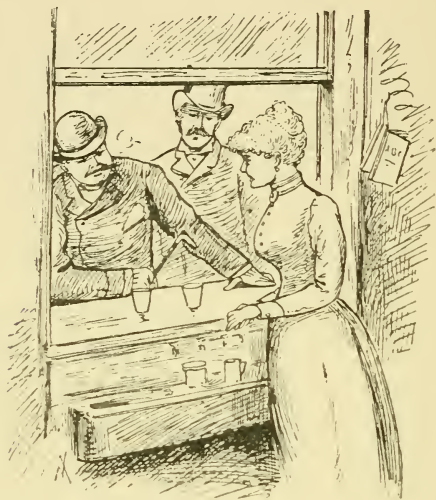
Having no better plan, in fact having no plan at all, I assented, and Foolby and I walked down to the White Lion, the chief hotel in Brightemall. We were both in excellent spirits, not to mention excellent beer. I felt that now at last I was a sportsman, and I remember I put my hat slightly on the side of my head.

“Good idea that of mine, advising you to send the horses to the White Lion.”

“Capital,” I replied.

“Yes, and, by Jove, won’t you have plenty of chances of spooning Flossy?”

This was unduly familiar on Foolby's part. Flossy is the barmaid at the White Lion, and if I have shown her any fatherly attention Foolby ought not to mention it. It is bad



AT THE WHITE LION.

taste on his part, and I did not retail his remark to Lavinia. I hoped that he would not allude to the subject in her presence. Yet I could not feel angry with him after what he had done for me ; so on arriving at the White

Lion, where we found Ridemruff and my horses, we went to see Flossy. Then I made arrangements for the proper accommodation of Beau Brummel and Sir Roger.

CHAPTER III.

MY FIRST DAY WITH HOUNDS.

DURING the next few days I spent most of my time in improving my equestrian powers and also my acquaintance with Sir Roger and Beau Brummel. This was necessary before I ventured to go out hunting, for my experience as a rider was limited in the extreme. In fact, it had been chiefly confined to riding ponies at Margate and donkeys at Hampstead Heath during my juvenile days. However, Foolby volunteered to instruct me, and at last declared that I was sufficiently advanced to be able to turn up at the meet; "though I wouldn't attempt to jump much, if I were you," he added.

This advice was unnecessary on Foolby's part, as I had no intention of jumping at all.

When the eventful morning arrived on which I was to make my *début* in the hunting-field, I must confess that I felt very nervous. I was on the eve—no, I mean, the morn—of an important epoch in my life. But I was determined to conceal my nervousness from Lavinia, for I wished her to be proud of me. Besides, nothing destroys the proper marital authority of a husband more than the betrayal of any fear.

I dressed with extreme care, though I tried to assume an air of indifference as if I were donning the garments of ordinary everyday life. Still Lavinia had at last to come to my rescue, and tie the bows of my breeches. I felt like a warrior of old, having his armour buckled on by his lady-love before going to battle, and made a happy suggestion to this effect to Lavinia.

"Herbert," she replied, "whatever you do, don't be rash."

“Lavvy, I mean to couple the boldness with the discretion of a sportsman.”

I then put on my pink coat and walked proudly downstairs to breakfast, an object of admiration to all my household, from Lavvy down to the housemaid. Foolby had promised to call for me at ten o'clock, and ride with me to the meet, which was some five or six miles away, and a few minutes before that hour Beau Brummel arrived, under the custody of Galey. Galey is the name of the head groom at the White Lion, but of him I shall have to speak at much greater length later on. I had chosen Beau Brummel instead of Sir Roger, on account of the latter's affection for mother earth, an affection which has the effect of continually dragging me on to his neck.

Galey was leading the Beau up and down before the entrance of Lavinia Lodge, much to the delight of a group of small children, to whom he—Galey, not the Beau—was evidently making funny remarks, when Foolby rode up, and dismounting, entered the house,

and greeted Lavinia and Bella. Foolby is always most polite and deferential in his manner towards Lavinia; I wonder whether he will be the same when he has married Bella.

“Don’t feel nervous, do you?” he asked, turning to me. “If so, I should take a little jumping powder.”

“Won’t you have anything yourself?” said Lavinia.

This was artful on Foolby’s part. However, we both had some cherry brandy, and I felt that my courage was considerably revived by it. I was ready to start, but Foolby took such a long time saying good-bye to Bella, and assuring Lavinia that he would take care of me, that it was fully twenty minutes before we left the house.

It must have been an imposing sight to see me, arrayed in the garments of the chase, walking from my hall-door to where the Beau was standing. But there the imposition ended. For, while Foolby sprang lightly into the

30 *In and Out of the Pig-skin.*

saddle, I had some difficulty in mounting on account of the shortness of my own legs and the length of those of the Beau. At last I managed to climb on to his back, though not before an



impudent little boy had suggested the use of a ladder—a remark which I pretended not to hear, though I knew that it made the bystanders giggle. Then we trotted off.

At first I was in a state of great elation ; then I began to feel uneasy, for Foolby kept regarding me in a way which made me think that he had discovered some fault in my general get-up.

“Nothing wrong, eh, Foolby ? ” I asked.

“No ; you look all right, at present.”

There was a peculiar emphasis on the words “at present,” as if the speaker thought I should not look all right for long. I do not like such cheap sarcasm : it is apt to take the conceit out of the person to whom it is addressed. We were not long before we were joined by other sportsmen, some of whom I knew ; and these congratulated me upon my taking to hunting. I made up my mind that I would shortly give a hunting dinner-party.

When we arrived at the meet we found a numerous crowd, including more than a few

ladies; and there was a genial air about everybody, as if they were all looking forward to the day's sport. This pleasant humour was contaminating; and, as we jogged along to the first covert, I said with a touch of pride—

“How do I look now, Foolby?”

“Rather like a fly on the back of an elephant!” was his rejoinder. Confound Foolby! My spirits sank down to zero immediately.

“We've got a mixed pack out to-day,” he went on, by way of giving me information.

“They seem the same breed,” I replied.

Foolby laughed. I afterwards discovered that he had alluded to their sex, and thought that the dogs must enjoy the hunting much more when the pack is mixed than when it is not.

We did not find a fox at the first covert, so went on to another, where we, or rather the hounds, immediately did find one. I shall never forget it. Somebody in front of me shouted “Yoicks! gone away!” and three or

four people behind me shouted "Forrader ! Forrader !" and we all went tearing down a muddy cartway like a second charge of Balaclava. To me it was nearly as dangerous as that famous ride of the Light Brigade. But I could not stop even if I had wanted to. I had what Foolby calls a good start, which means that I had a crowd of people pressing behind me, while Beau, who had hitherto behaved in a most sober fashion, was now animated with all the ardour of the chase. I was nearly blinded, too, by the mud thrown up by the horse in front of me. Certainly I would much rather have had a bad start than a good one, though I should have been sorry to have confessed it at the time. As it was, I galloped along with the rest till we came to a gate, and entered a large grass field.

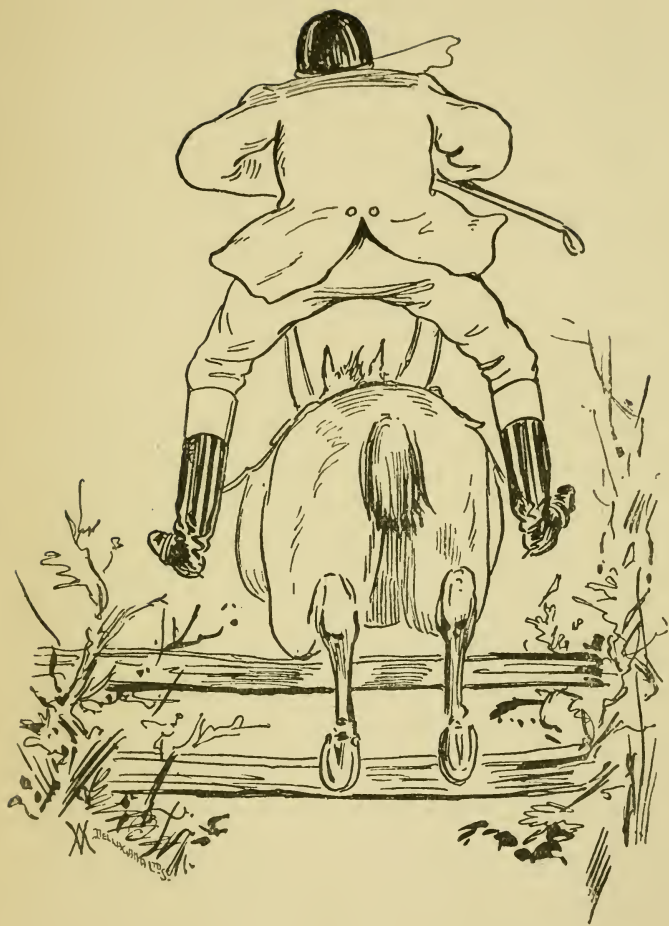
Now, I thought, was my chance to restrain the Beau's ardour, and to take an unostentatious position in the chase, so I tried to pull him back. But the more I tried to pull him back the more he tried to pull me forward. Had I

been deceived? This could hardly be a horse accustomed to carry a nervous old gentleman; and, alas! before me was a fence, and no sign of a gate.

“That’s right. You are going well. Stick your knees in, your hands down, and throw your heart over. The horse will do the rest.”

It was Foolby who spoke. I did stick my knees in, as their redness and soreness the next morning testified. What I did with my hands I cannot recollect, but I could not get my heart nearer to the other side of the fence than my mouth. But the Beau was determined to jump, so jump he did.

He is a clever horse, the Beau. He thought he could jump better without than with me on his back, so treated me as a battledore does a shuttlecock. Before springing he tossed me into the air, and on landing, caught me again much after the fashion of a London music-hall juggler. It might have been convenient to him, but it was decidedly inconvenient to me.



Yet I was thankful to find myself on his back again, and not on the ground, as I had expected.

We crossed two more fields, during which our game of battledore and shuttlecock was repeated twice; then I was able to act up to Lavinia's advice, and not be rash any longer. I always like to follow my wife's advice when it suits me, as it did on this occasion, when I managed to get Beau under control, and to follow as my pilot a stout old farmer, who seemed to know every gate in the county. With that confidence in my fellow-men which is part of my nature, I trusted that he knew where the hounds were, since I had not the slightest idea myself. So sometimes trotting, sometimes cantering, we bumped along, much to the advantage of our livers, if not of anything else.

But, alas! this was not to last much longer. We were riding over a wet ploughed field towards a gate when, as luck would have it, I dropped my whip. This was a predicament for

which I was unprepared. There was nothing for it but to dismount, though I knew the difficulty I should have in remounting ; but, if I had known how great that difficulty would be, I should have much preferred losing my whip. For when I had got my whip a difference of opinion arose between Beau and myself. He wanted to get on to join the hounds ; I wanted to get on to his back. Directly I had my left foot in the stirrup Beau would commence turning round and round, making me dance an involuntary pirouette on my right foot in a muddy ploughed field. I am sure that any ballet-girl—I beg pardon, young lady of the chorus—would have envied my agility. Now and then I varied the exercise by making convulsive springs, but of no avail. I might have been there till this hour but that during one of these spasmodic efforts, owing to Galey not having tightened the girths sufficiently, the saddle slipped, and I lay prostrate on my back, while Beau cantered quietly off.

Here was a nice position for a respectable

middle-aged gentleman to be placed in—on foot, in top-boots, with a coat covered with



mud, in the middle of a ploughed field. At first I used language which I should not have liked Lavinia to have heard; then I did the best thing under the circumstances—namely, I tried to capture Beau, who disliked cantering across a ploughed field without hounds, almost as much as I did walking across it. Fortunately for me a rustic came to the rescue as well, and between us we succeeded in catching the beast, whom I regarded with feelings of

intense dislike. Having readjusted the saddle and tightened the girths, I managed with the assistance of the rustic to mount, and, bestowing a coin upon my friend in need, rode off.

How should I account for my mud-stained back? I had not even had the honour, so often boasted of by hard riders, of having come "a nasty cropper." Why not say that I had had "a nasty cropper"? Hunting men do not always tell the truth, especially after dinner, and am I not now a hunting man?

I had hardly made up my mind to sacrifice truth to my own dignity, when I heard the sound of the horn. Beau pricked up his ears and stood still by the side of a hedge where we happened to be, while I strained my eyes to catch a sight of the hounds. What I did see was a little dark red animal, which I immediately conjectured to be the fox, going in a very tired condition down one of the furrows of the field. I forgot at once about my coat. There was the fox which I had come out to kill; yes, and there were the hounds already in

the same field. Now they were alongside of me. Beau turned round of his own accord, and we returned through the same gate which we had gone through before my disaster. In the next field the hounds killed the fox, and I was proudly conscious that I was "in at the death."



"Why, how the deuce did you get here?"

"On my horse, Foolby," I retorted. "How did you?"

"You seem to have stolen some landed property from somewhere."

"Yes, we had a fall or two," I answered airily.

"Horse don't seem so much the worse for them as your coat."

This was true; the Beau was in much the same condition as when he had left his stable in the morning; but there was no necessity for Foolby to have drawn attention to the fact.

“ Lucky for us he doubled, sir.”

This remark was made in an undertone, and I looked round to see who had made it. It was my agricultural friend with the broad back. He gave me a knowing wink; I think he must have overheard my conversation with Foolby. I thought it would only be common politeness to offer him my flask. He took it, likewise a good pull at it.

I did the same, and began to feel rather proud than ashamed of the mud on my back.

I felt that I had had quite enough for that day, so turned my horse's head towards home, or rather his home—namely, the White Lion Hotel, where I meant to interview two people, Galey and Flossy, for I was thirsty after my unwonted exertions.

Galey was a little wizen-faced man of about sixty, with little keen twinkling eyes, and the

most bandy legs it was ever my lot to see. How he ever came to the White Lion I never could find out, as he was far more fit for a whip or a jockey than an ostler. He possessed as big an amount of repartee as a London omnibus conductor, and an astonishing capacity for imbibing alcoholic liquids, without letting them have the slightest effect on him. His complexion was like wrinkled dry parchment, and whatever delinquency he might be found guilty of, he always had an excuse for it. He reminded me in this respect of the man who, having killed his father and mother, appealed to the jury to pity a poor orphan. On my blaming him for not having tightened the girths properly, he replied—

“Well, sir, they do get loose sometimes, especially if the 'orse is in good condition, like Beau, 'ere. I'm sorry you met with a haccident, sir, but Lor' bless me, you and the 'orse looked a perfect pictur' when you started. I was only sayin' the same thing to the guv'nor just now.”

It was not in my heart to blow up Galey after this, so I retired to quench my thirst, which took me some time, and then I hired a conveyance to take me back to Lavinia Lodge.

Thus ended my first day with hounds.

CHAPTER IV.

I RAPIDLY PROGRESS.



HAVE not yet said anything about Bright-mall society, or the people who constituted that society, because, with few exceptions, they are not worth mentioning. Lavinia called them narrow-minded, and Bella described them as odious ; while, as for myself, I took little notice of them or they of me. For one

thing, I never was much of a society man, and when it takes the mild form of eating muffins and drinking tea with curates and parsons' daughters, I utterly detest it, and generally manage to have another engagement. But now that I had become a hunting man society assumed a different aspect, and, owing to the exertions and attractions of Lavinia and Bella, we rapidly became known in a circle of sporting acquaintances. I was asked to become a subscriber to the Brightemall Hunt Ball, and, although I am not a dancing man, I consented: for I had always been taught by Lavinia that a married man has his responsibilities, not the least of which appears to be that of providing amusement for his wife and daughter. Still, I must confess that I considered it my duty as a sportsman to subscribe to the Hunt Ball. Besides, I should look so well in the pink Hunt dress-coat.

This last consideration had great weight with me.

I ought to say that by this time I had

greatly improved in the art of riding, or, as Foolby called it, the art of sticking on, though to my mind the two arts are one and the same thing. Not only had I been out hunting some half-dozen times since my maiden appearance in the field, but, under Foolby's guidance, I had practised my riding on off-days, and could now jump a hurdle without embracing my horse's neck. Still, I knew that pride is often apt to have a fall, so I restrained my zeal in the presence of others. Not that I lack the courage of an Englishman. Far from it. But I do object to making a fool of myself, and I object still more to hurting myself, especially as I get no sympathy from Lavinia. She only laughs at me.

Still, for reasons which I am still at a loss to explain, Lavinia encouraged me, and does now encourage me, in my sporting tastes. I am inclined to believe that the costume pleased her, for Lavvy's nature was always artistic. Yet, I must confess that, after taking everything into consideration, the chief reason for

Lavvy evincing such an interest in my hunting career was the society which that career brought to Lavinia Lodge, and which my wife most infinitely preferred to the tedium of Brightemall.

Naturally I liked this, for I loved my wife and was pleased when she was amused. But even marital affection, or, at all events, marital good temper, has its limits, so that when the following little conversation took place between me and Lavvy, I felt that I was in the position of an ill-used individual.

The conversation was between man and wife ; therefore, it was somewhat monosyllabic—that is to say, Lavvy did all the talking and I did all the monosyllables. I remember it well, it was *after* dinner (Lavvy had given me a very nice dinner that evening), and I was smoking one of my favourite villas, while discussing the merits of cognac mixed with a slight suspicion of coffee, when Lavvy—I saw her wink at Bella, who immediately left the room—came

and sat upon my knee, and put her arm round my neck.



I knew what was coming. At least I knew that something unpleasant was coming. Lavvy is never so affectionate unless either she wants money or wants me to do something which will cost money.

“Herbie, dear, I want to have a little talk with you, darling.”

“Yes, Lavvy,” I answered. “But my

whiskers are my own, and not the cat's; and you get stronger as you grow older, my dear; and I'm afraid the smoke from my cigar will get into your eyes."

Twenty years ago I should have thrown that villa into the fire. Time changes, and so do we. Lavvy is heavier than in the days of our courtship, and matrimony is the heaviest part of the wedding-cake.

"Herbie, dear, I think we ought to give a dinner-party."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well! you know, dear, we've been out several times lately. Besides, Miss Foolby is coming to stay with her brother, and we must pay her some attention, as she will be Bella's sister-in-law."

I could see that it would be no use resisting; yet I did not like to give way all at once. It was my duty to remonstrate.

"My dear Lavinia," I began, "have you considered that, although Jane is a most excellent cook, so far as our small requirements

are concerned, yet it is exceedingly doubtful whether she is capable of grappling with all the difficulties attendant upon a large dinner-party?"

"Bella and I have already made every arrangement for that, dear. We can have the turtle-soup from the Stores, and the greengrocer in Brightemall will open the oysters."

"But we can't dine off oysters and turtle-soup!"

"My dear Herbie, you don't understand these matters. If you will only leave it to me, everything will be all right. The only question is, Whom shall we ask?"

I wish Lavinia would not settle questions so peremptorily.

Within three days of this conversation Foolby's sister came to stay with him. We had never met her before, so naturally were anxious to see what she was like. I had a vague idea from casual remarks of Foolby's that she was decidedly a horsey young lady. Nor was I mistaken. On my first introduction

to her she put me through a regular cross-examination as to my riding qualities, showing me plainly that she knew considerably more about horsemanship than I did.

But if it had not been for her conversation, her costume would have told anybody that her tastes were sporting. Never before had I seen such an ulster as she had on when I first met her; never before had I seen such buttons as



the ulster had on. However, both Lavinia and Bella admired it, so it would have been foolish of me to criticise it in their presence. I be-

lieve Lavinia has already made up her mind to get one like it. These sporting tastes are so contagious.

Bella and Miss Foolby soon became fast friends. I believe that Foolby really asked his sister to stay with him in order that he might see more of Bella. Cunning dog, Foolby! Miss Foolby has offered, too, to teach Bella to ride, and I have determined to join in the lessons.

Miss Foolby is decidedly a very pretty girl, and not at all slangy, in spite of her sporting costume. Her godparents named her Diana in a spirit of true prophecy, but she is commonly called Di by those who are privileged to call her by her Christian name. I mention this, because I now belong to that privileged class, and, with the full permission of the young lady, shall henceforth in these memoirs call her "Di."

I have also the permission of Lavinia for doing so.

To people living in the country, with only a limited circle of acquaintances, the giving of

a dinner-party is a serious matter. There is the difficulty of getting the right people to meet the right people, and then of pairing them off properly. But as it was Lavinia and not I who had decided to give this particular dinner-party, I left it to her to choose the guests, with the comfortable reflection that, if anything did go wrong, I should be in the pleasant position of being able to blame her afterwards. I thought it would be a change, since she so often thinks fit to blame me.

Fortunately for Lavinia, however, our dinner-party went off fairly well. I should have enjoyed it more, perhaps, if I had not had to take in old Mrs. Squaretoes, the wife of our county member, who, in addition to other failings, suffers from deafness, which renders conversation somewhat difficult. Lavinia was more lucky, as she had young Lord Heavyweight to take her in, an Irish peer who puts up at the White Horse and hunts with the Brightemall hounds, because they won't allow him to hunt in his own country. Yet I must

not complain, for I had Di Foolby on my left, and she more than made up for the conversational deficiencies of Mrs. Squaretoes.



The dinner was like most other dinners—that is to say, everybody was rather dull until the champagne had circulated, when they began to grow more lively. Even our vicar, generally

the quietest and most sedate of men, got involved in an animated dispute with Heavyweight about marriage.

"I would never dream of marrying a widow," said the reverend gentleman. Luckily there were no widows present.

"Why not?" asked Heavyweight.

"Well, my lord, I look upon marriage in this light. I want a hat. I buy a new one, not a second-hand one."

"Perhaps so; but you never know who has tried it on before you."

It took two glasses of champagne to bring the vicar back to his usual contented frame of mind.

There were only twelve of us at dinner, so that the conversation could be general, a coincidence which I believe only Foolby and Bella were sorry for. The talk was chiefly of hunting, more particularly of a run which had taken place that day, and in proportion as the wine circulated, so did the fences become bigger, for the wineglass is the most powerful magni-

fying glass that was ever invented, and at the dinner-table the sportsman loves his reputation more than he loves truth.

After dinner, when we had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, I could not help laughing



at Foolby, who was intent on inveigling Bella into a small conservatory which opens out of the room. As a rule Bella does not need much inveigling — Lavvy was much the same, I remember, when we were

engaged—but on this particular evening she either did not or would not see Foolby's glance of invitation, with the result that Di and Lord Heavyweight strolled in instead. Foolby looked as if he should have liked to have

eaten Heavyweight on the spot. I, on the contrary, admired his taste.

“Herbert,” Lavvy said to me, after all our guests had gone, “we made one mistake to-night.”

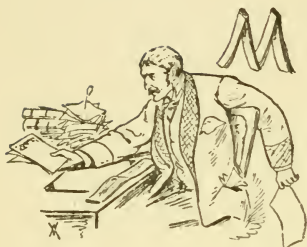
“What was that, my dear?” I asked.

“Di ought to have sat next to Lord Heavyweight instead of next to you.”

I have every confidence in my own powers of entertaining, but I must confess that I think Lavvy was right.

CHAPTER V.

LAVINIA'S GO-CART.



UCH as I like and admire Di Foolby, I must confess that she has unconsciously filled my cup of misery to the brim, or rather, she has been the cause of my signing my name to many more cheques than I should otherwise have done, which is much the same thing. For, although I like both Lavinia and Bella to take an interest in all my sports, yet I do not think it necessary that they should also participate in them. Unfortunately for me and my purse, they think differently, and what man could ever

withstand the combined attacks of two ladies living under his own roof? A jury of Benedicts unhesitatingly answers, "None."

But it was Di Foolby who was the cause of implanting sporting tastes in the bosoms of my wife and daughter. Until she arrived, their interest in sport had been confined to admiration of me, a limit which was very proper and just. But now all that was changed. In the first place she had lent Bella a habit, and professed to teach her to ride—a profession which was not accurately true, as Foolby did most of the teaching, and Bella seemed to prefer him as a tutor to his sister. This was bad taste on Bella's part; for I found myself that I had grown much fonder of riding since Di Foolby had come to Brightemall.

If Di had confined her influence to Bella I should not have minded; but, alas! that influence extended to Lavinia. It will soon be Foolby's duty to *control* Bella's expensive habits: until death do us part it will be my duty to *pay* for Lavinia's.

It happened in this way. Di, who is as good-natured as she is pretty, offered on more than one occasion to drive Lavinia to the meet, and to follow the hounds on wheels, offers which Lavinia accepted. I believe that she looked forward to these days with as much enthusiasm as a young girl in her first season does to a ball. She said at first that it would be so nice to take my lunch, and thus save me the trouble of carrying it myself. I agreed with her. But when at lunch-time I found her, I found also that I had been forestalled by certain hunting acquaintances, and that all the sandwiches and cherry brandy had disappeared.

I carried my own lunch in future. Perhaps that feeling of indescribable joy which most of us feel on first seeing hounds had made Lavinia forgetful. I forgave her, with my usual generosity—*after* I had obtained lunch elsewhere.

I began to observe, too, that several little confidential conversations took place between

her and Bella, to which I was not admitted, and wondered whether Di had broken up the mutual trust which had hitherto reposed in our happy roof. However, I was not destined to be kept long in suspense.

It was after dinner, and Lavinia, remarking that she thought I looked tired, had insisted on my taking an extra couple of glasses of port. I do not openly accuse her of hypocrisy, but nevertheless I have shrewd suspicions.

“Herbert, I have been thinking what a pity it is that we should not make use of our stable and coach-house.”

“Well, you see, dear, there is only one stall, and I have two horses; but I had thought that during the summer I might make some alterations.”

“Yes, dear; but now that, to please you” (oh! Lavinia! Lavinia!), “I have taken to driving to the meet, it really is necessary that I should have a go-cart and pony.”

I sipped my port in astonishment. The wine had begun to lose its flavour.

“ I was only talking to Di and Dick about it this afternoon ” (Dick, or rather Richard, is Foolby’s Christian name), “ and they perfectly agree with me. In fact, Dick kindly volunteered to choose both the cart and the pony for me.”

“ Did he ? ” I asked laconically. “ It was very good of him.”

“ Yes, wasn’t it ? ” Lavinia evidently does not understand sarcasm. “ And as Bella and myself must go up to town next week, the Foolbys could come with us, couldn’t they ? ”

“ I was not aware of any necessity for you and Bella to go up to town.”

“ You forget, Herbert, that it is hardly four weeks till the Hunt Ball, and we have not yet ordered our dresses. Besides, Bella must be measured for her habit ; she has been wearing one of Di’s all this time, you know ; and I thought you had half promised to buy her a horse.”

“ You wouldn’t like me to buy a deer-park at the same time, would you ? ”

"No, dear; but if you can get the refusal of that field at the back of the house, we might make a lawn-tennis ground there."

I am the most patient of men, the most



"WE HAVE NOT YET ORDERED OUR DRESSES."

generous of husbands, and the kindest of fathers. Certainly my banking account does not permit me to exercise these virtues to the full extent of my inclination, and for a man of my moderate income to be suddenly asked without any warning to buy a pony and trap, a horse, two ball dresses and a habit, to say

nothing of the expenses of a visit to London, is apt to make the hair stand on end. I gazed at the lady who is popularly supposed to double my joys and divide my sorrows in blank amazement. I thought she would be ashamed ; but she wasn't.

"Well, Herbert, we need not talk about the lawn-tennis ground at present. That can wait. But if you have your hunters, surely it is only fair that I should have a pony and trap. Besides, it would be so useful. We could drive about together in the summer ; and we could economize in other things, such as wine for example. And, really, Herbert, in the country I must have some conveyance to get about in. I owe no end of calls as it is, and chiefly amongst your hunting friends."

"Now, papa, don't be obstinate, but be a dear old thing, and say 'yes.'"

As Bella came, and sitting on my knee put her hand over my mouth, it was impossible for me to say either "yes" or "no."

Poor Foolby! I am afraid there is a sad future before you.

"Then that is settled. I will write to-morrow and take rooms at the Grand."

"Lavinia," I exclaimed—for my mouth was now free to speak—"do no such thing."

"Oh, papa!"

"I cannot afford such extravagance, so there's an end of it."

"You could afford to go to London with Dick to buy your own clothes."

I thought it best not to continue the discussion. It would be a bad example to Bella, on the eve of her marriage. Lavinia thought otherwise.

"And how are we to go to the Hunt Ball without any dresses?" she asked.

This certainly was a difficult question to answer. Lavinia saw that she had gained an advantage, and, like the clever tactician that she was, determined to follow it up.

"You know, Herbert, how proud you always are to see me well dressed."

O Flattery, thy name is woman!

"But, Lavinia, I do not see that, because you require new dresses, you should also want a go-cart, a pony, and a horse, nor why we should waste our money at the Grand Hotel."

"You surely don't expect me to walk ten miles to pay an afternoon call."

I could see that there was some reason in Lavinia's arguments.

"Well, I will think it over," I replied evasively, and my wife and daughter exchanged a glance of triumph. They knew that the victory was theirs, and so did I. But they had evidently determined beforehand to make assurance doubly sure; for on the next day the Foolbys came to lunch. Before post-time Lavinia had written to take rooms at the Grand.

A day or so before we went up to town I was in the White Horse Hotel, having just returned from a ride, when Galey came up to me, and, touching his hat, said—

"Beg pardon, sir, but I heard as you was about to keep a pony and trap."

"I had thought of doing so, Galey."

"I was a-thinking, sir, that you would be wanting somebody to look after it, if you was agoing to keep it at the Lodge, sir."

"Good gracious, Galey, yes; I had never thought of that."

The fact was that I had not yet grown used to the idea of Lavinia having a go-cart at all. Now it did occur to me that a go-cart and a pony without a groom would not be of much use.

"I made bold to ask you, sir, 'cause, if you're not already suited, I knows the very lad for the job."

"Indeed, Galey, who is he?"

"Well, sir, 'e is a nephew of mine, and is just out of a place, through his master giving hup a-keeping 'osses. But 'e 'as a splendid character, sir. 'E is a stopping with me now, sir; would you like to see 'im?"

“Not now ; but you can send him up to the Lodge this evening.”

“Thank you, sir.”



GALEY JUNIOR.

I mentioned my conversation with Galey to Lavinia, though I made it appear that it was I who had first thought about the groom. In due course Galey junior made his appearance. He was a smart-looking lad, and as his character was in every way satisfactory, I decided to engage him. I am afraid my stable expenses will form a

considerable item in my annual expenditure.

It is needless, for many reasons, to give a lengthy account of our visit to London. In

the first place, before long I shall have to recount another visit; in the second place, no inconsiderable portion of our time—at least, of the time of the ladies—was spent at the dress-maker's. My male readers would vote an account of this tedious, and the fair sex would see through my ignorance in a moment, and I should lose the respect and admiration with which they have always regarded me. I will only say that, instead of writing a fashion article, I have been obliged to write a cheque. I had very little more to do with the purchase of the go-cart and pony than I had with the purchase of the dresses. Foolby and Di relieved me of most of the trouble, excepting that of paying, and I noticed that, like most people when they are not buying for themselves, they acted regardless of expense. At the end of a week I was theoretically, and Lavinia practically, the possessor of a small go-cart, a roguish-looking pony, who rejoiced in the name of Punch, and the latest thing in harness, which were duly transferred to Lavinia Lodge, where

we shortly followed. I absolutely refused to buy Bella a horse. She can ride Punch if she wants to ride.

For the next few days Lavvy was like a child with a new toy. She and Bella, with the diminutive Galey junior seated behind, were constantly to be seen driving in and about Brightemall, to the great danger of all people on foot, till one evening she signified to me her intention of driving to the meet on the following day.

"Very well, my dear, if you think that you can manage Punch; but I shouldn't attempt to follow if I were you."

This remark, of course, produced from Lavinia a strong assertion as to her powers as a whip. I replied that it was not her power, but her science, that I doubted. She retorted that the Foolbys had said it would be perfectly safe for her, and she supposed they were better judges than I was.

I really shall be glad when Foolby and Bella are married. I compromised the dispute

by saying that I would drive them to the meet myself, sending Galey on with my horse.

Accordingly, next morning I drove Lavvy and Bella to a place called Muddyslough, where the hounds met. I believe this place had been christened Muddyslough on account of the damp marshes and muddy lanes with which it abounded. I noticed that at the meet our neat turn-out created quite a sensation, and when I had mounted the Beau I saw Lavvy chatting to a group of acquaintances, including the Foolbys, of course, as if she had been used to hunt on wheels all her life. Then we trotted off to a neighbouring gorse.

I thought that Lavvy had now driven back home ; but as we were standing at covert-side what was my astonishment to see the go-cart in the lane close by. I was both annoyed and afraid ; but felt somewhat relieved on seeing Foolby in attendance. Still, I determined to scold Lavvy on my return.

I had no time for further reflection. There was a "view halloa," a general stampede, and

the welcome cry "gone away." It was no false alarm, and we all sat down to follow, though I did my best, and with success, to hold back Beau, for I had a wholesome dread of the deep ditches and heavy ground on that side of the country, while, when hounds were at fault after running for ten minutes, the number of dirty backs proved that my caution was right.

Our fox had not run straight, but had taken us round a semicircle, so that those who had judiciously stuck to the roads were as forward at the check as those who had ridden at the tail of hounds. On looking round I saw three or four carriages but no go-cart, so congratulated myself that, after all, Lavvy had driven home. Alas! my joy was but momentary.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Mrs. Mynton has had an accident."

It was Ridemruff who spoke.

"Great heavens, Ridemruff! what do you mean?"

"Oh, there's nobody hurt, sir. She only drove into a ditch instead of keeping in the lane."

There was a scarcely perceptible smile on Ridemruff's face as he said this.

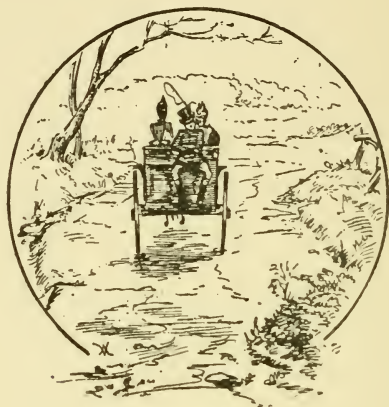
I hurried to the spot where the accident had



AFTER THE ACCIDENT.

occurred, and there a sight met my eyes which, under other circumstances, would have made me roar with laughter. Lavinia and Bella were standing in the lane with clothes covered with mud, and countenances decidedly crest-

fallen. The go-cart was in a dirty ditch, from which Foolby and two grooms were trying to extricate it, while Punch, who had been unharnessed, was looking on, perfectly contented at the mischief which he had caused. As I



EN ROUTE.

dismounted Foolby had just managed to get the go-cart into the lane, and I noticed that his efforts in the ditch had considerably impaired the glossy beauty of his boots. I inwardly rejoiced at this, for I felt sure that it was Foolby who had persuaded Lavvy

to follow, instead of obeying me by going home.

“No bones damaged,” he said, as I came up to the scene of the disaster.

“Is the cart hurt?” I asked, with the vision of a coach-builder’s bill before my eyes.

Luckily there was no harm done but what could easily be cured by the aid of water, so Punch was reharnessed, and, giving Galey my horse, I drove Lavvy and Bella away towards home as quickly as I could.

Poor Lavvy! I did not scold her. As it was, it was all she could do to prevent herself from crying.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HUNT BALL.

"'Tis only a county-town ball,
Where many a butt for your wit is ;
Yet here is epitomized all
The society life of great cities.
The 'Quidquid agunt homines,
Votum, timor, ira, voluptas,'
Your philosopher studies at ease,
And goes home when he decently supped has."
C. C. R.



THE Brightemall Hunt Ball was the great annual event of Brightemall society. Probably in this particular, as in most others, it was no exception to the general class of hunt balls. The houses in the neighbourhood, including Lavinia

Lodge, were filled with guests for the great occasion ; indeed, for weeks beforehand the question " Whom shall we ask ? " had driven hosts and hostesses into a frantic state of perplexity. I, however, was an exception in regard to this detail, as I had wisely left the choice of our visitors to Lavinia and Bella, and the choice provided them with a subject of conversation which never flagged either in interest or warmth.

" I think, Bella, we ought to ask Miss Consols. They have a nice house in Kensington and might ask us to stay with them for a few days in the season."

" But, mother, she is so dreadfully ugly. We could never get her partners, and one can't go about telling everybody that she is an heiress."

Then would follow a lengthy discussion as to the merits and demerits of Miss Consols, which finally ended in Bella being victorious. I wonder how it is that Bella can always beat her mother in argument. I never succeed myself in doing so.

At last, however, our party was fixed to the apparent satisfaction of everybody. We had got the right people to meet the right people, or rather to flirt with the right people. The only mistake was that we had omitted to ask anybody for me to flirt with ; but I considered it wisest not to mention this omission.

The day of the Ball was a busy one for Brightemall. Vehicles of every description, including Lavinia's go-cart, kept rattling through the town up to the station. The chief hair-dresser made more money than he usually does in a month. All day long there was a curious crowd in front of the entrance to the Town Hall, watching with mingled feelings of envy and admiration the preparations for the evening festivities. In fact, the town of Brightemall seemed to be bustling with excitement, and a stranger would have thought that at the very least a general election was pending.

We were to dine at half-past seven, so the ladies retired to dress about five. How they could spend all that time over their toilets was,

and is, a mystery to me. Still, when they did condescend to make their appearance—which was not until after the soup had got cold—I felt proud of the galaxy of beauty which it would be my duty to escort. I felt prouder still, too, when in due course we entered the ball-room, and the real business of the evening commenced.

A well-known poet, in describing a county ball, has written these lines :—

“ Here, before in training for brides,
Led out are the fillies of fashion ;
And often the form here decides
If a town course they’re fit for a dash on.”

So it was with the Brightemall Hunt Ball ; and, as I am not a dancing man, I had plenty of leisure to observe all that was to be observed. I could notice the proud look of joy on the fat face of the local doctor’s wife as she watched her daughter being whirled round by Sir Harry Broadacre, and the look of disappointment on that of the carrotty-haired daughter of the

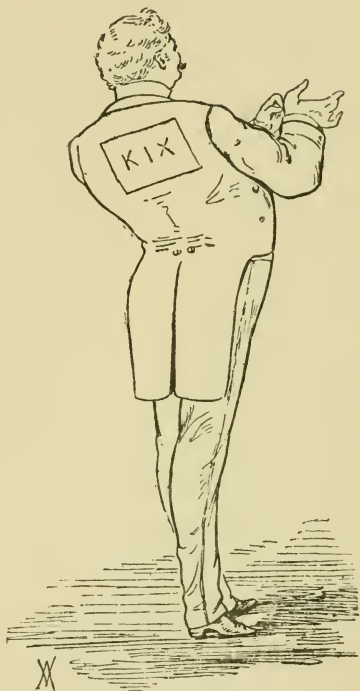
parson, who longed to be in the same position. Poor girl! you need not be so jealous; Sir Harry is a fish who has baffled all the arts of Belgravian matrons for the last dozen years, and is hardly likely to be caught by the rustic bait of your rival, fresh as it is.

I don't know to what extent my philosophical ruminations would have led me if I had not been led into dancing. It was Di Foolby who had the courage to take me in hand. Certainly it was only a square; but as nobody does think of taking the trouble nowadays to dance the correct steps, I got through it fairly well, though I must own that I did not enjoy it. I would much rather have sat it out with the same young lady. She said the floor was delightful; I thought it was like ice, and was in momentary dread of slipping down, an anxiety which was not lessened by the fact that Lord Heavyweight kept treading on my pet corn, and thereby causing me to give little involuntary jumps, which, although they increased the agility of my performance, yet

took away from that grace which would otherwise have been its distinguishing feature. To add to my annoyance, Heavyweight seemed so boisterously pleased with himself the whole time.

“I am engaged to Lord Heavyweight for the next dance,” Di said to me, as we were sitting out after my first and only square. “And he waltzes at such a pace that I really feel quite afraid that we shall come to grief.”

I suggested that it was not improbable. Heavyweight ought to have K.I.X. labelled



LORD HEAVYWEIGHT.

on his back when he goes into a ball-room. So, when he came up to claim Di, I settled myself to watch him, with every anticipation of being amused.

It was as I had expected. Away they went at express speed, Heavyweight dancing much as if he were a mounted policeman clearing a racecourse, and having about the same regard for the feelings of those with whom he came in contact. Now he cannons against Foolby and Bella, sending them, with a good deal of force, against a lively old dowager of about fifty. The dowager looks daggers at Foolby, who has to apologize, while Heavyweight continues his mad career, with a broad smile all over his countenance, as if it were the greatest joke in the world. There is one thing in his favour. He manages to steer so as to receive all the knocks himself, which is an advantage for his partner, though not for those who are knocked. It is really very amusing to watch him. Now he sends a feather-weight member of the London tribe of mashers, whose idea

of dancing consists in walking round the room with his partner extended at arm's length before him, right amongst the wall-flowers, and is halfway down the room before that young gentleman has recovered from his surprise. Now he stops and looks round, evidently pleased at the havoc he has created, while everybody else, not even excepting Di, looks relieved.

At last the time for the great event of the evening—namely, supper—arrived ; and the prospect of champagne and oysters, cold game, and other luxuries, seemed to have an enlivening effect upon everybody. I know that it had upon me ; and I was going to ask Di to let me take her up, when Lavvy came to me to say that it was my duty, as a married man and a host, to take up old Mrs. Squaretoes instead. This was annoying, but I had to do as I was bid, consoling myself, however, with the reflection that at a hunt ball one can go up to supper twice, so that I could take Di up afterwards. As Mrs. Squaretoes' appetite was

as great as her conversation was limited, I was enabled to make a good square meal, as they say, with the inward consciousness that I was doing my duty and was therefore somewhat of a martyr.



MRS. SQUARETOES.

I wish all martyrdom was as pleasant.

When Mrs. Squaretoes' appetite was appeased I conducted her back to the ball-room again, and waited my opportunity to secure

Di for a second edition of champagne and oysters, which I did when all the extras were over. I saw Mrs. Squaretoes looking at me as if she would have liked to come up as well ; but in the generosity of my heart I was



A NIGHTMARE.

unwilling that the lady should be the victim of nightmare ; so Di and I had a merry *tête-à-tête*, and discussed champagne and the company to the content of our respective digestions and minds.

After supper the spirit of the ball became more lively. I noticed that even the London masher occasionally condescended to smile, and Heavyweight was more dangerous than ever. There was a good deal of sitting out, too, in dark corners, and I have reason to suspect that the important question was popped more than once. Champagne not only elevates the spirits, but gives courage to the bashful lover. I have been told that no small percentage of the marriages in the neighbourhood of Brightemall are due to the Hunt Ball.

But the room was now beginning to grow empty. People with long drives home remembered that they had to get up early if they meant to hunt on the morrow. Chaperons and old fogies were anxious to get away, now that they had had their supper, and I, although I am far from being an old fogy, must confess that I was longing for an armchair and a pipe, and was far from sorry when Lavinia came to me and said—

"Herbert, it is really time that we were going. Do try to collect our party together."

I promised to try, but I soon discovered that to try and to succeed are very different things. There was Bella in the middle of the room dancing with Foolby. I had no sooner caught her eye than I missed two others of our party, whom I eventually found out very close together in a dark corner, and who looked as awkward at my appearance as I felt at finding them. I was dodging about for full twenty minutes with the consciousness that my young guests were anathematizing me the whole time. At last we got together and away, and after a short smoke went to bed, to get as much sleep as we could before hunting on the morrow.

But that day's hunting requires a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER VII.

A COFFEE-HOUSE MEET.



SEEMS to be an established custom that the meet after a hunt ball should be more fully attended than any other meet during the season. Those who either don't ride or have nothing to ride turn up on wheels, and it almost goes without saying that the members of my house-party were determined not to be out of the fashion. So, as they were too many for the go-cart, I had chartered a brake from the White Horse. I, of course,

was going to ride, and turned up at the breakfast-table in my pink and buckskins, much to the admiration of a young friend of ours from London, who had never been to a meet before in her life.

I had lent Beau Brummel to one of my guests—a loan which afterwards he was sorry that he had accepted—so was obliged to ride Sir Roger myself. I noticed that this guest, Swivel by name, grew a little nervous as the time approached for us to mount, so I asked him if he would like a glass of champagne.

Swivel said “Yes.” Swivel is a sporting writer: that was why I had offered him the Beau, thinking that he would enjoy a day’s hunting. I believe now that his hunting is chiefly confined to Fleet Street, where he pursues an animal called the “oof bird,” which, to judge from the difficulty in catching it, must be a very wary animal indeed.

In due course Galey junior appeared, riding Sir Roger and leading the Beau, while Galey senior drove up with the brake. It really was

quite an imposing sight in front of the gates of Lavinia Lodge.

“Now, Swivel, come along ! It’s time we were starting.”

Swivel emerged from the dining-room with courage revived by champagne, and proceeded to climb on to the back of the Beau, while I pointed out the merits of that quadruped to the young lady from London in a way which would have done credit to Ridemruff himself. I then mounted Sir Roger, who made his bow to the company in his own peculiar fashion, namely, by putting his head between his fore-legs and his hind-legs in the air. At first I had found this habit somewhat inconvenient, but by this time I had grown used to it. We then jogged slowly along to the meet, leaving the brake to overtake us.

We were soon there, for the very good reason that we had not far to go, and, as I had expected, the meet was very largely attended : far more largely, indeed, than was consistent with the interests of sport. It seemed as if

everybody had come out for a huge winter picnic, which in fact most of them had. They were there chiefly to talk about the ball, and regarded the hunting as a subsidiary amusement provided for their entertainment when other subjects failed. Even the Master pretends to look pleased, though inwardly he is consumed with anxiety as to the safety of his "beauties."

Swivel and I spot out our brake and make the best of our way towards it. Foolby is already there: also Heavyweight, whom I can hear saying that he will look out for them at luncheon time. I mentally resolve to find the brake before Heavyweight does. Swivel looks as if he wished it was lunch, or at least orange brandy, time now.

At last the disappearance of the hounds make us remember that we have come out to hunt and not to chatter, and, leaving the people on wheels to take care of themselves, we canter off to the first covert we are to draw, where we stand waiting impatiently to see

whether Reynard is at home. All that I can see is that Heavyweight is very careful to keep close to Di.

But, if the covert ever did contain a fox, it is soon evident that he has gone away without even the formality of leaving his address in the shape of scent behind him—a want of politeness which, I am sure, Swivel thanks him for from the bottom of his heart. He looks as if he were relieved instead of being disappointed ; but I pretend not to notice it.

“I am sorry we drew that covert blank, Swivel, but we are sure to find at the gorse, and get a good spin over one of the best parts of the country. You’ll find the fences a bit tricky, but if you only give Beau his head he won’t bring you to grief.”

It was a good mile and a half to the gorse, and the whole way I tried to raise Swivel’s spirits with the hope of a good run. Yet my efforts were in vain.

The carriages had been able to come round by the road, much to the joy of their occu-

pants, who either wanted to see themselves or to show their friends as much of the sport as possible ; nor were they destined to be disappointed. The gorse was situated on the top of a hill, whence you could see the country around for miles, and a clever coachman, even if he could not see what the hounds were doing, could easily show his charges no small amount of the fun supplied by the field.

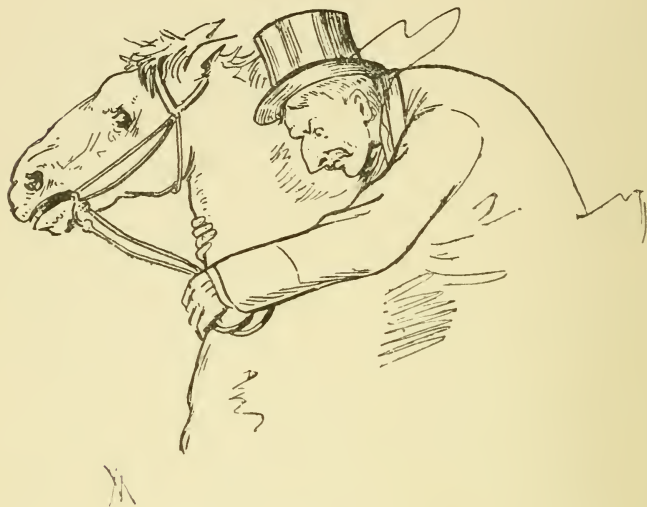
“Tally-ho ! There he goes, down towards the post-and-rails. A regular stout old dog-fox, or I’ll eat my hat ! Tally-ho !”

“Tally-ho !”

“Forrad away ! Forrader ! Forrader !”

Away we all went, *nolentes volentes*, and Swivel was obliged to come with us, down towards the post-and-rails, as formidable a piece of field upholstery as one could wish to see. I watched carefully to see if anybody took off the top bar. There was Heavyweight going at it on a horse which looked more like an elephant than any other animal. Bang, smash !

A lighter pair must have come to grief; but Heavyweight goes on as if nothing had happened, leaving me to follow where he has taken away the top rail. I looked behind. Beau



SWIVEL EMBRACES THE BEAU.

is determined to have it, whether Swivel likes or not. Well done, Beau! I almost exclaim aloud, as the lanky beast glides over, and Swivel embraces him affectionately round the neck. Two or three easy fences follow, and

as I follow Heavyweight, they are rendered still easier for me.

I had had the luck to get a good start and a convenient leader, which perhaps accounted for my courage. I felt that I was going well, and devoutly hoped that our party in the carriage could see me.

On we go! Hounds are going racing pace, and we are evidently in for one of the good things of the season. Both Heavyweight and myself are gradually losing the good places which we had at the start: the pace is too quick for us. Still we persevere. Crash through a bullfinch goes my leader, and I creep through. After him we are in a large grass field, at the end of which a row of willows tells an ominous tale. I can already see empty saddles on the other side of the brook, and horses refusing on this side. Should I have it or not?

“Put the pace on, sir, and trust to Sir Roger. He can get over all right.”

I glanced round. It was Ridemruff who had

spoken. He was riding a young un, and had evidently had more than one tumble. His



A MISHAP AT THE BROOK.

advice determined me. We got nearer and nearer. Sir Roger gathered himself together

for the effort, and in another moment we were over.

I believe that was the proudest moment of my life.

The sound of a splash made me look round. At first I could only see Beau on the *taking-off* side of the brook, trotting quietly away. The horse had followed his stable companion so long as he thought it convenient; but, seeing no reason to jump the water, he had galloped up to the edge, put his head down, and sent Swivel into the middle of the stream, up the bank of which he was now clambering.

"Catch the horse and go round by the bridge," I shouted, for I could not jump back to help him, so did the best thing I could, viz. gave him good advice, and went on.

"Come along, sir, this way. He has turned short."

Again it was Ridemruff. His dripping state showed that he had gone *through* and not *over*. I was thankful to have him as a pilot. In

another ten minutes we were again with the hounds. Reynard had turned short down a ditch, and hounds had overrun the scent, so the time spent in casting back had enabled us to get on terms with them once more. But the little red rover's cunning tactics proved his ruin. He had doubled back towards the road, where the carriage people were congregated. Frightened and uncertain which way to turn, he once more made for the open. But it was of no use; his strength was spent, and after struggling across two more fields he was tumbled over.

But where was that crowd of brilliant horsemen who had looked so gorgeous at the meet? A very small minority were "in at the death;" a few more came straggling up while the obsequies were being celebrated, though these were for the greater part "roadsters" who had stuck to the "'ard 'igh road." The majority had been thrown out or thrown off. Oh! the *stories* which would be told that evening over the wine! How one lost a shoe, and another's

horse went suddenly lame after the first fence ! It would be a hundred to one against Ananias in the " Ninth Commandment Hunting Stakes," and ten to one that he would have been left at the post.

But I am transgressing. In these short memoirs it is not my intention to moralize. Besides, I am certain that I ought not to preach about the beauties of truth. I prefer to leave that duty to barristers, politicians, parsons, *et hoc genus omne*. So, to return to the main stream of my story—not the stream of the run, for I don't want to return to that again—I felt that after my exertions and the glory which I and Sir Roger had gained, it was ample time that the interior of my physical organization should be made ampler, which rightly interpreted means that I should reach our brake before Heavyweight did, or before the lunch was entirely consumed. So Sir Roger and I walked towards the road ; we both of us walked, for after the way in which the horse had carried me I felt that he de-

served to be relieved of my weight for a time. I found Di standing by the side of the brake.

"Have you seen Dick?" she asked me as I came up.

"I fancy that I saw his horse careering about the country, and somebody rather like Dick trudging after him."

"What has become of Mr. Swivel?"

"Oh, I left him in the brook," I answered casually.

The young lady from London looked at me as if she thought me the most cruel man in the world. So I looked another way, and saw Heavyweight coming up.

"Lavvy, give me some lunch and something to drink."

I knew what Heavyweight's appetite was.

"Ah, Mrs. Mynton, told you I should find you at lunch time. I say, Mynton, how well that gee of yours took you over the brook! My brute refused, and I couldn't get him over anyhow. Still I was rewarded by seeing the funniest sight you ever saw."

"What was that?"

"A little man on a lanky beast rather like that other horse of yours tried to follow you. Result: the horse stopped, and he took a header right into the centre of the stream."

"Did he catch the horse?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, or rather some rustic did for him. By all the powers, here is the very man!"

Poor Swivel looked a lamentable sight with his dripping garments. Heavyweight hid his discomfiture in lunch, and everybody else



THE RETURN OF THE BEAU.

seemed inclined to laugh, except the young lady from London, who apparently pitied the little man. Orange brandy, however, did a good deal to restore him, and doubtless by this time he has told his friends how he was in the first flight all along. He was in the first fright anyhow, and a letter can't make much difference.

I advised him after dinner to write an account of the run, and call it "Flood and Field."

CHAPTER VIII.

I GO TO FLEET STREET.



A WALK DOWN FLEET STREET.

THE hunting season was coming to a close, and, as Bella and Foolby were to be married soon after Easter, I was not much surprised when Lavinia informed me one day that it was time to order Bella's trousseau.

"Then, my dear Lavvy, by all means order it," I replied.

“And there’s her wedding dress, and my dress, and altogether a heap of things to see to. I am afraid we must go up to London for two or three days to order the things, and then go up again to have them tried on.”

As Lavinia on this occasion really had a tangible excuse for a jaunt to London, I did not oppose it. Besides, I should have to buy many things myself, such as a new suit of clothes for the auspicious occasion.

Foolby and Di were to come up with us, for Foolby had to get a lot of new furniture and so forth. But I will not bother my readers with an account of the preparations which had to be made for the wedding. They shall, if they like, read of the ceremony itself in due course. At present I shall ask them to follow my movements during our short visit to town.

I was lounging along the Strand one morning with the idle air of a man who has nothing to do but to kill time when I met Swivel,

who looked more sporting in the street than he did on the back of the Beau.

“Never expected to see you in town at



SWIVEL.

this time of the year,” he said. “If you’ve nothing better to do come and have some lunch.”

I had nothing better to do, for Foolby and Bella had gone off to choose furniture, and Lavinia and Di were on a shopping expedition, so I accepted Swivel's invitation.

"You don't mind walking as far as Fleet Street, do you? I want to go to the office, and then we can lunch at a very curious old place up there."

"Not in the least. Besides, I should very much like to see something of the inner life of Brain Street, as you call it."

"Should you? All right, then. I'll act as your cicerone."

We walked on until we came to the corner of Chancery Lane, when Swivel said—

"Come in here and have a sherry-and-bitters. You'll be bound to see a lot of the literary element."

"What's the name of this place?" I asked.

"The Monastery, where beautiful nuns serve one with alcoholic refreshment to stimulate the brain of the overworked journalist. It is presided over by a jovial monk, who constantly

asks you to have a glass of 'the old, the very old, dear boy,' with him."

"Oh, indeed," I replied, as we entered the Monastery, where I expected to see men "with judgments matured by observation and reflec-



IN THE "MONASTERY."

tion, tastes refined by reading and study," as Mr. Pickwick expected to find Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen, and, like that great man, I was deceived in my expectations. I suppose my looks expressed my astonishment, for Swivel said—

“With few exceptions, these fellows are only second-raters, the hangers-on of literature, so to speak. Some of them will spend hours here, waiting for something to turn up, with about twopence in their pocket to get a glass of beer with. They call themselves Bohemians, and pretend to be hail-fellow-well-met with each other. Really, they are the most jealous set of men on the face of the earth, and abuse each other like pickpockets behind their backs, while they vary the monotony by borrowing shillings and half-crowns from anybody who is foolish enough to lend them to them.”

“Oh! And these are the members of the fourth estate of the realm?”

“Well, after all, they are like certain members of the third estate, for they are in perpetual danger of being suspended. You see there are a lot of papers started, which only exist for a month or so, when they go smash. Somebody, however, must write for them, and here you will find the contributors. Some of these fellows, no doubt, have a splendid literary

reputation amongst the nursemaids who perambulate in Battersea Park."

At that moment I heard one man, who was the centre of a beer-drinking group, remark in a loud tone, "My experience is that the life of a journalist is spent in public-houses, with occasional intervals in a newspaper-office." I was beginning to agree with him, when Swivel, my guide, philosopher, and friend, suddenly made a strategic movement to a little smoke-room behind. I followed.

"Did you see that red-haired fellow who just came in?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Just keep an eye on him, will you? He has got a committal-order for me, and, although I am the most loyal of subjects, it would be inconvenient for me to accept Her Majesty's invitation to Holloway Castle to-day."

I went back to watch the red-haired gentleman. He was evidently asking about Swivel, and found that the universal opinion was that he was at Monte Carlo.

"I heard that he was in London last night, anyhow," remarked he of the red hair.

"Drew a cheque for travelling expenses from the office this morning, and caught the twelve o'clock train," replied the gentleman who had previously given his opinion on a journalistic life. Swivel told me afterwards he was a novelist, so I suppose he was only keeping his hand in for fiction.

We then adjourned to lunch. I forget the name of the place where we went to, but I think it was the Old Cheshire Cat. I know that we ate some pudding composed of larks, kidneys, oysters, and other ingredients, and that Swivel had three helpings of it. I was told that it—the place, not the pudding—had been a favourite resort of Dr. Johnson's, and was pointed out a spot on which the Doctor had been accustomed to recline his head. From the greasy state of the spot I judged that the Doctor had been as extensive a patron of pomatum as his literary successors were extensive patrons of pudding and beer.



AT THE OLD CHESHIRE CAT.

“Come along!” said Swivel, whose spirits were raised by luncheon and the idea of having escaped from the red-haired gentleman, in

much the same proportion as the spirits of the Old Cheshire Cat were lowered. "Come along! I've a lot more to show you."

"Of a literary nature, Swivel?" I asked.

The little man smiled.

"Even literary men must have a little relaxation," he replied.

I had begun to think that it was all relaxation, but did not say so. It might have hurt Swivel's feelings.

We got into a hansom.

"Greciano's," shouted Swivel. "Must introduce you to the Grecians."

I thought that now at last we were going into classical society, and should enjoy intellectual conversation which would remind me of my old Oxford days. I was not disappointed; no—I was only mistaken.

We pulled up opposite to a restaurant in the Strand, and Swivel jumped out and into the restaurant, leaving me to pay the cab and follow. I found myself in a long bar, at the top of which was a dining-room, and in front

of it a crowd of men, most of whom Swivel seemed to know, and all of whom were unmistakably thirsty. I was immediately introduced to a big, stout man, who answered to the name of "Chief," and whose mission in life seemed to be to pay for the alcoholic refreshment of the men who were round him. I told Swivel this, and he informed me that he was an editor, and that editors were always expected to pay for the drinks of the staff. This was about the only piece of literary information that I learnt, and, according to the staff, the only piece worth learning. Still, my inquiring mind wanted to know more.

"Swivel," I asked, "do journalists collect their news in bars?"

"Most of it," he replied. "The Divorce Court is not a bad hunting-ground. No more is a racecourse, except that it is so confoundedly expensive."

I had heard of the "New Journalism;" now I began to understand what it meant.

After a time we went up into the dining-

room, where there were several actresses and music-hall artistes having a late luncheon. Swivel seemed to know most of them, and



UPSTAIRS AT GRECIANO'S.

chatted with one or another till he saw the waiter coming with the bill, when he went on to the next table. I did not notice this until I had been twice left behind ; then I thought it would be cheaper to follow Swivel's example.

To judge from their luncheon bills, the salaries of actresses must be much greater than I ever thought they were ; but my mind

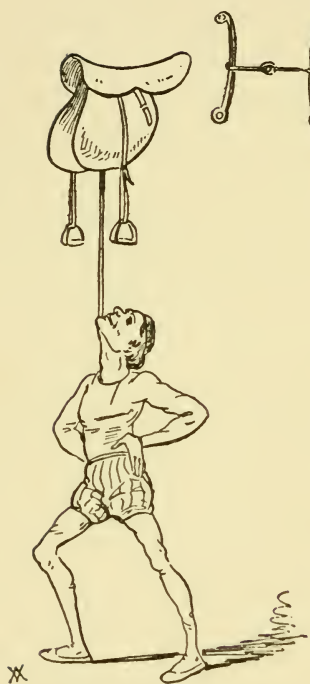
had already been disabused of so many previously conceived notions that nothing would have surprised me.

How long I might have remained carrying out my investigations, both literary, dramatic, and otherwise, I do not know, if Swivel had not told me that he must go home to dress, a statement which reminded me that it was quite time that I went home as well. I am afraid I felt rather like a guilty schoolboy when I met Lavinia; but, fortunately, she was too much engaged in telling me the details of the dress she had ordered for Bella's wedding to notice my confusion.

I think that some day I shall go again to the Grecians, if only to improve my knowledge of the dramatic profession.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRIGHTEMALL STEEPLECHASES.



HAVING christened these memoirs by the imposing and sporting title of "In and Out of the Pig-skin," it is with a regret not born of modesty that I have to confess that I have nothing further to relate of my own performances *in* the pig-skin. The end of the hunting season has arrived, and both Galey and the veterinary surgeon have decreed that both Beau and Sir Roger need

rest; also, as one lives and learns, I have lately learnt that horses prefer to take their rest on sawdust, to taking it on anything else. The reason for this I cannot explain; but Galey says it makes them better timber-jumpers. Galey may be right or wrong: in any case I shall be in the position to give a decided opinion about his statement next season. At present I incline to the belief that he could give Ananias two stone and a beating in the Hibernian hurdle race of furze falsehoods run over the Westminster course *after* the dinner-hour. I will only add, therefore, that the mere fact of Beau and Sir Roger requiring rest proves that since my return to Lavinia Lodge from drawing the coverts in Fleet Street and the Strand—in which coverts I was rather the fox than the hound—I had lost neither time nor opportunity in riding and tumbling off my two quadrupeds, and in otherwise demonstrating to the world at large my ardour for the chase.

But if I cannot write about myself as being

in the pig-skin, I can at least give pleasure to the reading public by writing about others in the same position. In other words, to give a brief description of the Brightemall Steeplechases, and on the principle that onlookers see most of the game, I feel sure that I can do that far better than if I had been *in* the pig-skin on that memorable day. In fact, if I had been *in* the pig-skin, the chances are that my experience of the races would have been confined to the first fence of the first race in which I rode.

After this preamble, which I have written not so much for the benefit of the ordinary reader as for the benefit of the juvenile class of would-be novelists, who expend their energies on the penny productions of modern fiction, so that they may be able to see what an inestimable advantage "padding" is to an author when he has nothing to write about, I will now proceed to the subject of this chapter—namely, steeplechasing as exemplified by the Brightemall Steeplechases, held at the

village of Northbridge, which village, I have good reason to believe, is famous for nothing else, and would not even be famous for its races if I had not taken the trouble to write about them.

It seems to be a recognized rule in nearly every hunting county in England that the end of the hunting season should be celebrated by a race meeting. This is as it should be, because it gives an opportunity to those ladies and gentlemen whose disasters in the field have afforded amusement to their superiors in the saddle to take their revenge, and in their turn to laugh at the attempts of the *soi-disant* first-flight men to break their necks by imitating professional jockeys in racing across a country. I have a very funny notion about this, which I intend to sell to Sir Augustus Harris for his next pantomime. However, sufficient for the day is the good thereof, so I will now confine my literary genius to the hitherto unknown racing meeting of the Brightemall Hunt.

We—that is, Lavinia and Bella—made up a party of six for the occasion, which included, besides ourselves, Foolby, Di, and Heavyweight, with Galey junior to attend to the opening of the hamper and champagne bottles, without which—I allude to the champagne, not Galey junior—no country steeplechase meeting is complete. When the provisions were duly packed we proceeded to pack ourselves into a waggonette, and drove off, or rather on, to the course, which was about five miles away.

I have said that we packed ourselves into a waggonette, and I ought to further state how we packed ourselves. Lavinia and myself sat opposite to each other, Bella and Foolby side by side, as likewise Heavyweight and Di. With the exception of Lavinia and myself, nobody seemed to object to the fact that the carriage was originally intended to hold four people instead of six.

As we drove through Brightemall it seemed as if the inhabitants of that usually sleepy

town had suddenly been aroused into a state of frantic dissipation. The White Horse must have been doing a stupendous trade, to judge from the number of vehicles of every sort, size, and description which were standing



TYPES IN THE MARKET-PLACE.

before it, while the market-place was crowded with every type of man. The jolly rubicund face of the farmer, the sharp countenance of the Israelitish bookmaker, horsebreakers, gipsies, yokels, all were there—some for business, some for pleasure, but all bound

for the races, and all intent upon enjoying what Foolby termed "the humours of the road."

Whether it be an advantage or a disadvantage to be compelled to be only a spectator of, instead of a participator in, these humours, I cannot say. I felt as if I were witnessing the harlequinade of an out-door pantomime, and certainly should not have cared to be at the mercy of some of the clowns. I should not have borne their practical chaff with my ordinary good-nature.

We got on to the course without any mishap, not that there was any reason why a mishap should have occurred to us, and secured a good place close to the rails. The first race would not come off for half an hour, so Heavy-weight suggested that we should walk round the course. This we—that is, Foolby and myself—agreed to do. We also agreed that lunch should be got ready in our absence, so that we could eat it between the first and second races—and drink it till the last race.

We then trudged off to look at the fences, of which I need only say that, although I have been often told that a jump looks much bigger on foot than on horseback, yet there was hardly a single obstacle in the course at which I should have cared to have ridden the Beau or Sir Roger.

"Now, then, let's have a sweepstake," cried Heavyweight. "Let me see, we shall have to put in a blank, as there are only five starters and there are six of us." (Wonderful arithmetician, Heavyweight!) "Will you draw first, Mrs. Mynton?"

I drew the blank. I drew blanks the whole afternoon, except once, when there were seven starters; then my horse fell at the second fence.

After the first race lunch seemed to be the order of the day. What a popping of corks there was! It seemed as if everybody on the course wanted to join in the prayer of the poet—

“O wines of Champagne, pure and mellow,
Grace let me implore,
From Carte Blanche and Carte d’Or,
While from Monopole and Montebello
Libations to Bacchus I pour!”

And it was not until the magic sound of the saddling bell was heard that we again thought about the real business of the day. Then we all jumped up in a hurry, and I upset a plate of cold chicken into Lavinia’s lap.

The next race was a hunters’ steeplechase, which we were told would prove very exciting, as one horse was certain to win if his jockey, who was also the owner, could ride him. It appeared that this man could not ride unless he was partially intoxicated, and the difficulty was to train him to his fit condition and not to overtrain him. As he rode by in his preliminary canter many were the opinions expressed.

“He’s too drunk. He can’t possibly ride round the course.”

“Nonsense! I don't believe they have given him enough.”

As a matter of fact, the fellow won in a



HE WON IN A CANTER!

canter, by about ten lengths. I heard afterwards that he tried to ride the horse home in the evening, but tumbled off into a

ditch, where he was found the next morning asleep, with the animal calmly grazing beside him.

The next of the races, with the exception of a few falls, contained nothing of much interest. We betted and I lost. We drank champagne and smoked, and occasionally strolled into the paddock, as most people do on such occasions ; and, after the last race, started home again, which we reached safely, in spite of the erratic driving of several Jehus on the road.

After such a pleasant afternoon it was not likely that we were going to break up our party, so I asked the Foolbys and Heavyweight to stay to dinner.

"Never mind dressing ; we can sit down as we are."

As Foolby and Heavyweight accepted at once, Di had no opportunity of refusing.

"Excuse me for the present, I've got some important letters to write."

And I went into my study.

I had hardly sat down before Lavinia entered. I thought of the cold chicken and trembled.

“Herbert, you have been betting to-day.”

“Yes—and lost,” I answered.

“Well, I want to make one bet with you now.”

I was surprised.

“You seem to have caught a gambling fever.”

“I will bet you a new dress that Lord Heavyweight and Di are engaged before dinner.”

“But, Lavvy, even if I won, the dress would be of no use to me.”

“Then you can have a pair of gloves instead. Come! A dress to a pair of gloves. Is it a bet?”

“Oh! very well; if you like.”

I must have been writing for nearly an hour, when the door burst open, and Heavyweight’s voice exclaimed—

“I say, old chap. Oh, I beg your pardon,

I thought Foolby was here. But, I say, I've entered."

"Entered what?"

"Entered for the matrimonial stakes."

I congratulated him heartily, for I was really glad to hear of the engagement.

"But," I continued, "wouldn't it be better to announce the happy news after dinner? Manage to have a little *tête-à-tête* with Di, while Foolby and I sit over the wine, and then let it come out as a surprise in the drawing-room."

"Well, Di has already rushed off to tell Mrs. Mynton."

"Then it's of no consequence," I replied.

I proposed the health of the newly engaged couple at dinner, and Heavyweight pretended to return thanks.

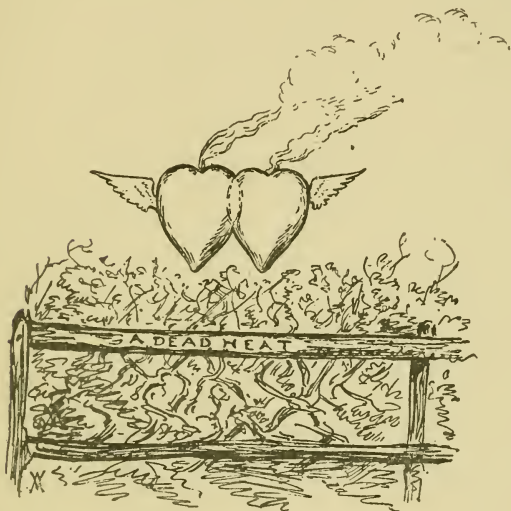
"You must know," he said, "that our worthy host wanted me to announce all this—er—you know—er—in the drawing-room afterwards—er—you know—to—er—sort of ring down the curtain."

“ Herbert ! ” It was Lavinia’s voice.

“ Yes, my dear.” How red I was !

“ And a bonnet as well, my love.”

Then everybody laughed but me ; for, of



course, Lavvy had told Di about the dress, and she had told Heavyweight and Bella, and Bella had told Foolby.

I was the victim of a foul conspiracy.

“ Never mind, papa dear ; we have been

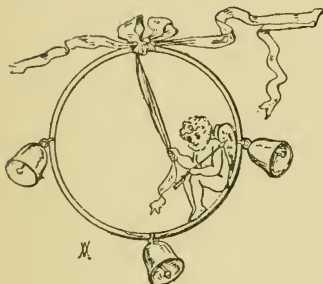
racing to-day, and you caught the turf fever, didn't you ? ”

“ But forgot to square the ring,” laughed Heavyweight.

Anyhow, I was not allowed to forget to settle.

CHAPTER X.

WEDDING BELLS.



HE day fixed for Bella's wedding had at last arrived. I say "at last" advisedly, because for the ten days preceding it Lavinia Lodge had been in a state of the most utter discomfort. The drawing-room had been turned into a private exhibition of the wedding presents, with the result that my own study — my *sanctum sanctorum*—was crowded with various paraphernalia, such as Dresden china and Chipendale furniture. I might have borne this

contentedly, but the prevailing confusion extended to the culinary department. Lavinia was invariably away all the morning at Foolby's house, helping Di to make all arrangements for the happy couple, while the happy couple did nothing but talk inane nonsense to one another. Not that I overheard much of their conversation; I only judge from what Lavinia used to say to me immediately before our marriage.

Thus I lived in a chronic state of boredom and bad dinners. If I was at home in the afternoon I was driven out of the drawing-room by the female visitors who had called to see the presents; if I went into the dining-room there were Foolby and Bella; and if I sought refuge in *my own* study, it was ten to one that I found Heavyweight and Di. More than once I thought of running away to London and seeking the society of Swivel, but I was not quite certain that he might not be in Holloway. To add to my misery, Lavvy told me that she wondered that I could be of

no use. I wondered likewise; but, as I could find no solution to the mystery, I did my best to keep out of the way.

And yet there are men now alive who call themselves "lords of creation"! I was not even "lord" of my own house.

Then, of course, we had had a lengthy discussion as to what hour the ceremony should take place. Lavvy wanted it to be at two o'clock. She said that was the fashionable time. I replied that we could not well sit down to breakfast at three.

"You think the breakfast the most important thing, I suppose?"

"Most certainly, my dear," I answered.

Then followed a little conjugal conversation, in which the terms "gluttony" and "religion" got so mixed up as to remind anybody but myself of a clerical dinner-party. It reminded me of the uselessness of a certain phrase in the Prayer-book, about love, honour, and obedience. The change in our marriage laws, recently decided in the Law Courts, had not

occurred, or doubtless it would have reminded me of that. However, as I find Lavvy a sufficiently strong antagonist, I will not provoke the enmity of all the Women's Rights Associations in the kingdom by giving the details of our argument. I have no wish to be obliged to seek refuge at the North Pole yet. Suffice it to say, then, that, after a debate as lengthy and as vituperative as any which ever took place in the House of Commons, it was decided that the religious ceremony should take place at one, and the eating and drinking ceremony immediately afterwards.

In one matter Bella had been extremely fortunate, namely, in the selection of her bridesmaids. Di was the principal one, and the others were two very pretty, lively girls, old friends of hers. After their arrival at Lavinia Lodge, I did not find my boredom so unbearable. Unluckily, however, they only came the night before the wedding, so that my period of misery was not very much reduced.

I know that Lavvy was awake at seven o'clock on the eventful morning, because she woke me to say that it was a fine day. I tried to go to sleep again, but it was of no use; just as I was dropping off, Lavvy said—

“Herbert, do get up. There is such a lot for you to do.”

As far as I knew, my only duty that morning was to put out the wine—an important duty, I confess—but not one that would be likely to take me a long time. However, I reversed the marriage service and obeyed. The only result of my obedience was that I had to wait over half an hour for my breakfast when I got downstairs.

The worst of having weddings so late is that nobody knows how to get through the morning. On the other hand, it may be said that if you have them early nobody knows how to get through the afternoon. So that, after all, it is but a choice of two evils. I know that after I had put out the wine I wandered about in a hopeless condition, getting

into everybody's way, until I did at last what I might just as well have done at first, and went off for a stroll with the two pretty brides-



KILLING TIME PLEASANTLY.

maids. So I passed the rest of the morning very pleasantly till it was time to have some lunch and dress.

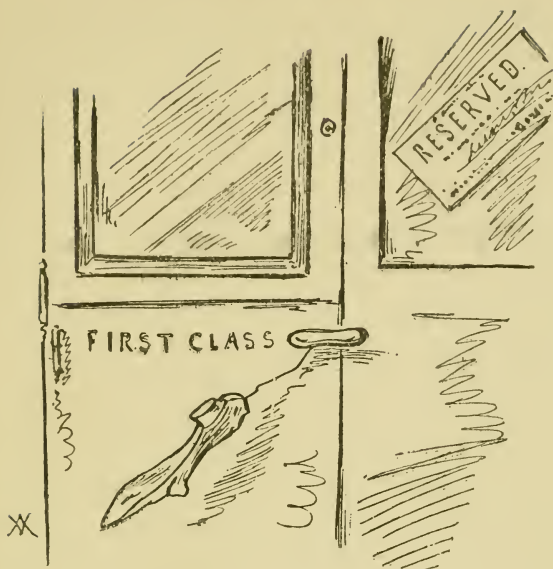
Bella and I were, of course, the last to leave

the house for the church, and, when the carriage was waiting at the door, I own that I felt sorry to think that I was going to lose her. Mere sentiment, reader, you will say; but, as there is so little of that article in the world, take my advice, and cling tightly to what is left. I should have liked to have clung tightly to Bella for a moment, but I was afraid of spoiling her dress.

Weddings are all more or less alike, and Bella's did not differ from the rest. There was the usual crowd at the church-door, who made audible remarks of a truthful and annoying kind. There were the bridesmaids looking as if they would like to change places with the bride. There was the best man, in this case Heavyweight, having the appearance of a Pagan priest about to sacrifice a victim to the gods. Last, but not least, there were the bride and bridegroom, looking like amateur actors appearing for the first time on the stage, only, if anything, a trifle more nervous. The guests resemble the audience in the stalls at

a *matinée*, while pit and gallery are represented by the horrid urchins and old women who exercise their physical strength in throwing old shoes and rice. With the exception of the last-mentioned athletic contingent, everybody is glad when they are on the way home again to drink the health of the happy couple.

We were certainly a merry party at Lavinia Lodge. We drank success to Foolby and Bella. I made a sly allusion to Di and Heavyweight, which made Di blush—nothing could make Heavyweight blush—and when we had all eaten and drunk enough or more than enough than was good for us, we did what most people do under similar circumstances, and stopped. Then Bella and Foolby drove off to the railway station, trying to look as if they had been married for years, and signally failing in the attempt, a failure which lasted throughout their railway journey, as Heavyweight had bribed a porter to tie an old shoe on to the handle of the door of their carriage.



HEAVYWEIGHT'S LITTLE JOKE.

Foolby does not know to this day why they created such a sensation at every station they stopped at.

The rest of the day was uneventful. The servants got more or less tipsy, as they usually do on such occasions—they seem to think it is their special prerogative, which it would be a disgrace not to exercise. The pretty brides-

maids were more or less sleepy, though what they had done to make them so I do not know, and everybody was glad when it was time to say "good night."

And now I must say "farewell."

There is a law amongst novelists, as inviolable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, that when the bell rings for the curtain to go down after a wedding—and a wedding is the final scene which meets with the greatest approval—it should be stated that the married couple lived happily ever afterwards. As often this final scene, which I have myself adopted in order to increase my popularity, takes place in the same year as the book is published, the reader is led to imagine that the lives of the said married couple did not extend beyond the honeymoon. Now, unless the honeymoon be spent at Monte Carlo, or some other place noted for suicidal mania, this supposition is generally erroneous. Again, the Edwin and Angelina of fiction are generally represented

as being blest with a family of little boys and girls, which representation, for the reasons already stated, is often an insult to Angelina. In the present case, as Bella and Foolby have been married less than six months, I can only state that, to the best of my belief, their lives have been happy, and that, to my certain knowledge, they are not blest with a family of children. I must, therefore, apologize for violating a hitherto inviolable law.

But the customs of novelists are as numerous as the tricks of advertising agents, company promoters, and other people of whom the public hold a high estimation. One of these customs is, take the *dramatis personæ* in the order of merit, and briefly say what happened to them. So, as I am *facile princeps dramatis persona*, I will narrate the only thing which has happened to me worth telling; and that is, that when I rode Sir Roger cub-hunting about a fortnight ago he was so fresh that he put me over his head on to the ground, where I lay on my back. Luckily the ground was soft.

Of Lavinia, I need only say that, now that Bella has left home, and there is nobody to dispute her authority, she has grown stouter. Such is not the case with Punch, whom she drives every day and everywhere.

Di is now Lady Heavyweight. I know that because I had to give Hunt and Roskell a cheque before the wedding, and had a headache after it.

The two pretty bridesmaids are still unmarried; but, as matrimonial agencies have gone out of fashion, nobody need apply to me for their addresses.

Everybody else is well, much to the disgust of the local undertaker. Even Ridemruff has not broken his neck.

One more word, and I have finished.

Some writers, who must hold a very bad opinion of the intelligence of their readers, apologize to them for having written a book. I do nothing of the sort. On the contrary, I shall expect the reading public to apologize

to me if they don't purchase my work; I don't care whether they read it, but as I want to buy a new hunter I should like the money.



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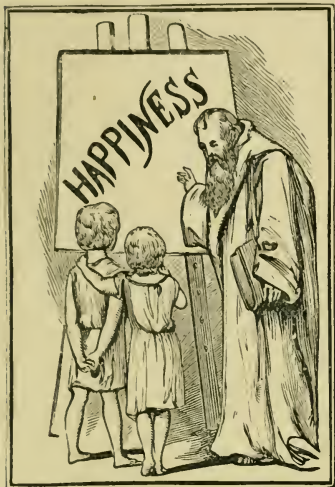
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